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Strengthening further the Economic and Social Council, building on its recent achievements, to help it fulfil the role ascribed to it in the Charter of the United Nations as contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration

Strengthening further the Economic and Social Council, building on its recent achievements, to help it fulfil the role ascribed to it in the Charter of the United Nations as contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration

Report of the Secretary-General**

Executive summary

The present report aims to support the Economic and Social Council in considering further possible steps to ensure that it more effectively fulfils its role as ascribed to it in the Charter of the United Nations.

The international community enters an era of implementation of the commitments undertaken at the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development and other conferences. In this phase, the Economic and Social Council is challenged to help bring the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and other actors together for implementing these outcomes in a collaborative manner and to help maintain the focus on reviewing and monitoring the outcomes of these conferences in a balanced way. Globalization, and the need for more integrated approaches to peace and development also present new challenges to the Economic and Social Council in respect of its role in fostering coherence of actions and policies.

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This report presents a number of proposals on how the Economic and Social Council can respond to these new challenges and further enhance the effectiveness and impact of its work, building on progress made in the wake of the last major reform exercise of the Council. The report notably addresses issues related to the follow-up to the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as to the Council's contribution to peace-building and conflict prevention. Suggestions are made for enabling the Council to introduce greater flexibility in scheduling its sessions and for organizing its coordination segment so that it enables the Council to better address the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits undertaken by the United Nations system and other actors. Recommendations are also put forward for improving the visibility and impact of the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation and humanitarian affairs segment, as well as for enhancing the effectiveness of the management of the work of its functional commissions by the Council. The report also contains suggestions for increasing the outreach of the Council to non-governmental organizations and civil society.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council decided to devote the coordination segment of its substantive session of 2002 to carrying forward the objective set forth in the United Nations Millennium Declaration[1] whereby heads of State and Government resolved (para. 30) to strengthen further the Council, building on its recent achievements, to help it fulfil the role ascribed to it in the Charter of the United Nations.[2]

2. The Millennium Summit and the International Conference on Financing for Develcpment, held in Monterrey, Mexico, have brought to the fore, more than ever before, the need for policy coherence, comprehensive and multisectoral policy responses based on partnerships and robust international cooperation. These challenges are at the heart of the Council's functions, as the central coordinating body of the United Nations system.

3. While the reform undergone by the Council over the past years has made it much more effective in fulfilling its functions, it needs to consider what further steps can be taken to meet the challenges.

4. The present report aims to assist the Council in this process.[3] The first two sections highlight new challenges and issues affecting the Council's work, leading up to the proposals and recommendations contained in the last section.

I. New challenges

5. A number of developments pose new challenges to the Council. They call for more flexible and responsive approaches to how the Council organizes its work.

6. The United Nations Millennium Declaration places new demands on the Council as a catalyst in bringing together all actors in advancing common goals for poverty eradication and development, and for ensuring that globalization becomes a positive force for all. The follow-up to the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development identified a specific role for the Council's annual spring special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions in the follow-up to the Conference. These meetings were assigned the task by the Monterrey Consensus (A/CONF.198/11, chap. I, resolution 1, annex) of addressing "issues of coherence, coordination and cooperation" (para. 69 (b)). The Monterrey Consensus further called for intensified interactions between representatives of the Council and the directors of the executive boards of the Bretton Woods institutions as well as representatives of the World Trade Organization on matters related to Conference follow-up and preparations for the annual spring meetings between those institutions. Devising an effective process for "staying engaged" — and an effective contribution of the Council to this process — will be crucial, if the high expectations arising from Monterrey are to be met.

7. There are three interrelated challenges in developing modalities for implementation of this key part of the Monterrey Consensus. The first one is how to continue and build on the multi-stakeholder partnership forged in the preparatory process that brought together the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization, as well as the private sector and the civil society. The second is how to construct an intergovernmental process that, while centred at the United Nations, adequately engages the intergovernmental bodies of the other institutions through various mechanisms. Third, there is the question how to provide broad-ranging substantive support and sustain a high political profile for the follow-up process.

8. Another key challenge for the Council in the months ahead is how to further enhance its contribution to integrating economic, social and environmental objectives, as an essential component of its role in respect of the promotion of overall policy coherence, in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The work of the Council in fostering debates among Governments, and international institutions, and among its functional commissions including the Commission on Sustainable Development, on the integrated follow-up to conferences and on comprehensive approaches to development and its sustainability has helped nurture a policy environment that is increasingly conscious of the need for more integrated governance.

9. As the United Nations pursues the implementation of the complementary agendas defined at the Millennium Summit and the Monterrey and Johannesburg conferences, there will continue to be a clear need for a platform for developing a more coherent and integrated framework for the follow-up

and monitoring of the outcomes of these conferences. The Council has, in recent years, played a leadership role in promoting a coordinated and integrated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s. This effort helped pave the way towards synthesizing the conference outcomes into the millennium development goals. Similarly, the Council's spring meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions and its exchanges with their executive boards have helped establish the framework for the strengthened partnership that will have to be arranged with these institutions in the Monterrey follow-up process. The present juncture provides a unique window of opportunity to build on these achievements in order to deepen and broaden this process.

10. Another challenge in today's international environment would be for the Council to help the international community address in a flexible and timely way situations requiring urgent attention in view of their risk for longer-term developmental goals, inter alia, in particular economic crises. With globalization, the factors, scope and effects of economic crises have taken on new dimensions, requiring a stronger international focus in addressing them and timely mobilization of international attention and support. A role by the Council in this respect would be a logical extension of the responsibilities highlighted thus far. As the Council develops its role as the principal interlocutor with the trade and finance institutions, it could also contribute to the economic and social stability required for steady progress towards the millennium development goals. Its effective exercise would require, however, significant adjustments in the Council's methods of work.

11. Another crucial — and in many ways related — challenge is to advance conflict prevention, peace-building and development comprehensively. The international community is increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing inter-linkages between relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and longer-term development for building peace in a comprehensive manner. Appreciation has also grown for the need to move from a culture of reaction to armed conflicts towards a culture of prevention. It has furthermore been established that an effective strategy to prevent conflicts requires a comprehensive approach embracing actions in a wide range of areas, including political, diplomatic, humanitarian, human rights, and institutional measures, as well as efforts to promote development.[4] This stems from the recognition that sustainable development and conflict prevention are mutually reinforcing. To promote such an integrated approach, the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council and other partners will need to work much more collaboratively than they have so far to address issues of prevention, relief, recovery and peace-building in a mutually reinforcing way.

12. Within both the General Assembly and the Security Council, there has been increasing recognition of the contribution that the Economic and Social Council could make to the effective implementation of conflict prevention and peace-building strategies. The Assembly, based on the report of its Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa,[5] has called upon the Council to engage in matters relating to conflict prevention and peace-building in Africa, with a view to improving coordination of international support in these areas. The Security Council, at its 4465th meeting, held on 31 January 2002, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Africa", reaffirmed the importance of strengthening its cooperation, through greater interaction, with the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with Article 65 of the Charter of the United Nations,[6] in the area of the prevention of armed conflicts, inter alia, in addressing the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems (see S/PRST/2002/2).

13. The Economic and Social Council has already begun to respond to these concerns in a pragmatic manner. The setting up of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti in 1999 (in Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/4), in response to a request of the Security Council, and the holding of an Economic and Social Council meeting on the development aspects of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic in Africa in February 2000 have provided examples of the type of specific actions that the Economic and Social Council could undertake. The Economic and Social Council also contributed to the discussion of and follow-up to the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict in Africa (A/54/133-E/1999/79) at its coordination segment of 1999. More recently, the President of the Economic and Social Council addressed the Security Council at its 31 January 2002

meeting on the situation in Africa. The Economic and Social Council held a briefing/dialogue with the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the situation in Afghanistan and international efforts to integrate development and humanitarian activities there. An ad hoc advisory group on countries emerging from conflict in Africa, when initiated, could be an important element in enhancing the role of the Economic and Social Council and in developing collaboration with the ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa set up by the Security Council.[7]

14. Overall, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/326) on the road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the international community is emerging from "an era of commitment" to enter an "era of implementation" of the commitments of major conferences and summits (para. 11). In this new phase, the Council is challenged to bring to bear its capacities for harnessing the efforts of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions and for mobilizing the efforts of all actors, including the private sector, foundations, non-governmental organizations, academics and other members of civil society, to ensure that the international community maintains a focus on these agreed international goals and that progress is monitored in a comprehensive, integrated and balanced way.

II. An overview of Economic and Social Council reform

15. The main emphasis of the past reforms has been on increasing the impact and effectiveness of the Council's work, through a shorter and more focused session, clearer and action-oriented guidance for the United Nations system, and better oversight of its subsidiary machinery and of the funds and programmes.[8] Particular attention was devoted to the role of the Council in coordinating the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits and on enhancing its relationships with the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. The Council subsequently gave detailed guidance for enhancing the complementarity of the work of its functional commissions, notably on the follow-up of major conferences, and for improving its own oversight and guidance of the work of its subsidiary bodies. It also provided guidance to the regional commissions, following the completion of its review of their respective reforms.[9]

16. As documented in the most recent progress report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/56/77-E/2001/69), many of the recommendations made in this last round of reform have been implemented, but much has yet to be achieved.

17. Today, the Council remains active with greater intensity of activity and a more ambitious agenda than in the past, including, besides its substantive sessions in July, the annual special high-level meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions; thematic meetings with the agencies; round tables and panels; briefing sessions on the outcome of the meetings of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) (formerly the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)); and various organizational and resumed sessions. The effectiveness of its work has also been enhanced through in-depth preparations via panels and informal consultations. The fact that the Council now decides on the themes of its high-level and coordination segments during the substantive session of the year before has facilitated advance substantive preparations.

Role of the Council as a high-level forum on economic, social and related issues

18. The Council now plays a more effective role as a high-level forum on socio-economic policy issues and has deepened its substantive interaction with international financial institutions.

19. The high-level segment of the Council helps focus attention of policy makers and the United Nations system on major economic or social policy issues. It is prepared through an increasingly in-depth and participatory process, which engages Member States, United Nations system organizations and, more and more, civil society partners, including non-government organizations and the private sector. This year, the holding of round tables in preparation for the segment early in the year has helped to build consensus among Member States and other partners. The segment attracts high-level participation and its outcome — a ministerial declaration since 2000 — has become increasingly focused and action-oriented. As a result,

the Council's impact and visibility have increased. Notable examples of significant and innovative outcomes are the partnership launched by the Council in 2000 to help bridge the digital divide through the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force, and its role in 2001 to mobilize international support for African development, in response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development, including the active engagement of the private sector and the non-governmental organizations.

20. Since 1998, the Council's spring meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions have involved finance ministers in a dialogue with ministers of foreign affairs and development cooperation on the longer-term developmental impact of economic and financial change.[10] The follow-up to the Monterrey Conference should provide an opportunity to give greater focus to these meetings, ensure that they lead to more effective outcomes, and to reinforce the involvement of the World Trade Organization in the Council's work.

Oversight of the United Nations system's work on the follow-up to major conferences and summits

21. Since 1995, the Council has devoted particular attention to the coordination and oversight of the United Nations system's work on the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. The Council identified cross-cutting themes and adopted a thematic approach to the follow-up to the major conferences of the 1990s. At its coordination segments, it has addressed substantive themes common to all conferences (such as poverty, the enabling environment, gender mainstreaming) and emerging key challenges (such as mobilizing partnerships on information and communication technologies (ICT)) as well as more process-related issues (such as how to improve intergovernmental reviews of major United Nations conferences and summits). The agencies of the United Nations system have been actively involved in this process. The Council conducted in-depth reviews of the United Nations system's work in specific areas at special dedicated events, which has led notably to a major effort by the system to review and harmonize its work on statistics and indicators on conference follow-up. Its focus on cross-cutting themes and on synthesis of conference agendas has helped crystallize attention on the key development goals and the means of implementation as reflected in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. This focus on cross-cutting themes and on guidance and coordination of the United Nations system's work has enabled the Council to complement the work of the General Assembly on specific conferences.

22. However, a significant gap remains between the guidance emerging from the Council, and the day-to-day work of the system, particularly at the country level. Often, the insufficient impact of the Council's work mirrors fragmented approaches at the national level. Beyond this, the format of the outcome of the segment — agreed conclusions — may not be the most conducive approach to action-oriented follow-up. Besides, the executive boards of the United Nations funds and programmes and of the agencies are not always cognizant of the work of the Council. Overall, the role of the coordination segment of the Council in achieving greater coherence of the substantive work of the United Nations system on conference follow-up needs to be further enhanced.

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation and humanitarian affairs

23. As regards the oversight of operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation, while, at its recent sessions, the Council has developed recommendations on, for instance, poverty, gender, funding, capacity-building, and harmonization of procedures, it has not yet been able to provide clear policy guidance to the funds and programmes pursuant to the oversight role assigned to it by the General Assembly.[11] While the Council's dialogues with executive heads and country teams at its operational activities segment have been of broad interest, they have not always yielded clear practical results. The reports of the Executive Boards and the consolidated list of issues prepared by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) have not always been used effectively for developing substantive guidance by the Council on the United Nations system's operational activities work.

24. The Council still has to establish more clearly its role in respect of the system's operational activities vis-à-vis both the General Assembly and the Executive Boards. The Council needs to provide clearer guidance

on major issues that cut across the funds and programmes. The impact of the Council's guidance on the work of Executive Boards and on the operational work of the system at the country level also needs to be enhanced.

25. For the Council to serve as an effective development cooperation forum, it is imperative to engage the participation of high-level policy makers in the development cooperation field both from developed and from developing countries as well as the executive heads of funds and programmes.

26. The Council's humanitarian affairs segment has provided, since 1998, an important forum for review of the humanitarian affairs activities of the system and for their coordination. It has helped in focusing on the continuum between relief, reconstruction and longer-term development — and thus helped to fill a gap in this area. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Council in 1999 at its humanitarian affairs segment were a landmark in this regard.[12] More recently, given the sensitive nature of the issues discussed, it has been difficult to arrive at a formal outcome for the segment. This has limited the Council's ability to guide and coordinate these activities. The arrangements for the segment need to be reviewed to further enhance the capacity of the Council in this important area.

Management of the Council's subsidiary machinery

27. An important advance of recent years stems from the fact that the Council and its subsidiary machinery have started to work much more closely together as part of the same system. There have been an unprecedented interaction and exchange of information among the functional commissions and between them and the Council, leading to more cohesive and mutually reinforcing work on the key goals of United Nations conferences and summits.

28. The working methods of the functional commissions have also greatly improved as a result of both the Council's guidance and of the review of those methods by the commissions themselves. Examples include the growing use by the functional commissions of multi-year work programmes, the pattern of electing Bureaux at the end of the session and the growing utilization of panels and working groups to focus debate on practical issues and benefit from national experience. These innovations have led to better preparation of the sessions of the commissions and enhanced the relevance and depth of their work.

29. This progress has been driven by significant improvements in the Council's oversight and guidance of its subsidiary machinery at the general segment. A number of tools and practices have been introduced to help the Council review and guide the work of its functional commissions during that segment. These include preparation by the Secretariat of a consolidated report on the work of the functional commissions, regular joint meetings among Bureaux of the Council and its commissions and, more recently, participation of the President of the Council in meetings of the functional commissions. The Council has thus started to guide the work of its commissions, improve the overall coherence of their work and stimulate substantive interaction among them.

30. The Council will need to build on these initial steps, if the Council and its subsidiary bodies are to serve as a coherent system for review of progress and monitoring of results during entry into the phase of implementation of the Millennium Summit goals, the Monterrey Consensus, and the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit and other major conferences.

31. This will require a much clearer focus by the Council on its management functions, particularly at the general segment. The Council still devotes much time to a proforma consideration of the reports of its functional commissions, and too little time to addressing substantive and coordination issues emanating from these reports. The general segment remains overburdened with a number of disparate items, many of which are not central to the system-wide coordination objectives that the Council is mandated to serve. The Council could do more to build on the work of its functional commissions, and the regional perspectives brought by the regional commissions, for the purpose of developing its own overall guidance and strengthening its management role.

Working methods

32. Given the new challenges, the progress achieved thus far and the gaps that remain, the Council needs to review both the overall architecture of its sessions and its working methods to see where further progress can

be made to enhance its overall capacity to meet the new demands being placed on it. For example, its substantive session, although curtailed to four weeks, is still regarded by many as too long and structured in a way that is not conducive to the effective functioning of all segments with the level of participation required. A long annual session also tends to make for inflexibility in the working methods of the Council and makes it difficult to sustain a high degree of interest and engagement of delegations over the entire session. While the high-level and coordination segments have functioned quite well, the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation, humanitarian affairs and general segments have not always been able to attract the kind of participation necessary to maximize policy impact and concrete results.

33. A number of improvements could also be made regarding the documentation submitted to the Council. Reports submitted to the Council currently fall into three main categories: (a) reports requested and considered only by the Council, addressing the main theme(s) of its segments or specific items; (b) reports transmitted to the General Assembly through the Council; and (c) reports emanating from the Council's subsidiary machinery, the funds and programmes and coordination bodies. A greater effort needs to be made to build a clearer architecture among these reports, and ensure that there is no duplication and overlap among them. The next phase of reform of the Secretary-General will address many aspects linked to reporting on economic and social issues, including reporting to the Assembly, and the Council and its commissions. The Council could also give impetus to efforts to avoid duplicative requests for reports, consolidate the preparation of reports and improve the overall architecture of reports submitted to it.

34. To sum up, the following questions will need to be addressed:

(a) How to further strengthen the Council's role in integrating and coordinating the follow-up to the Millennium Summit and other recent conferences, particularly the Monterrey Conference and the forthcoming summit in Johannesburg; and how the Council can better address system-wide coordination issues, including in key areas emanating from these international events;

(b) How to enhance its relevance to and impact on policies, programmes and activities of the United Nations system, including at the country level;

(c) How to better project the Council's role at the national level, through involvement of a broader range of ministries in its work, and better information to senior public officials of Governments, parliaments and civil society, based on progress made thus far;

(d) How to develop the role of the Council as a forum for international development cooperation; and how it can develop a more substantive dialogue with the funds and programmes and their Executive Boards, leading also to better coordination among them and with the Council;

(e) How to enhance its role in coordinating the system's humanitarian affairs activities;

(f) What modalities need to be developed to enhance the oversight and management capacity of the Council in relation to its subsidiary bodies;

(g) How cooperation between the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council can be developed with a view to promoting a more comprehensive approach to peace-building and conflict prevention;

(h) What steps can be taken to further promote the contribution of various sectors of civil society and the private sector to the work of the Council.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

35. The following recommendations have been designed to help the Council to consider possible steps to address these questions and meet new challenges.

A. Council's role in follow-up to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus, and the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and other recent conferences

36. The Council may wish to consider how best to develop and promote an integrated and consistent follow-up to the development objectives agreed at the Millennium Summit, as well as the commitments

on financing for development made at Monterrey, and the outcomes of the forthcoming Johannesburg Summit. The Council's decision on the theme for the coordination segment of its substantive session of 2003 is highly relevant in this regard.[13]

37. In this context, the Council may wish to consider how best to enhance its support of the General Assembly in achieving the millennium development goals, notably the target of halving the number of the world's extremely poor by 2015, as an integral part of its work on the follow-up to major international conferences and summits. The United Nations Millennium Declaration provides a powerful tool for enabling the Council to focus its work on conference follow-up on a synthesized set of goals and targets, around which to keep the United Nations system mobilized. A comprehensive review of progress would be facilitated if the coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits were to be the main standing item of the coordination segment and if the themes that the Council examined at its high-level, coordination and operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segments were chosen to address in a mutually reinforcing way cross-cutting issues arising from the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit.[14]

38. Overall, the Council should aim to forge a strategic partnership among the organizations of the United Nations system including the international financial and trade institutions for implementing the goals of the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Conference and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The high-level policy dialogue with trade and financial institutions during the high-level segment and the potential of the joint spring meetings of the Council, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization should be fully utilized for this purpose.

39. The Council's coordination and operational work should aim at ensuring that policies, operational work and country frameworks of all United Nations system organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, are consistent with these goals, through collaborative reviews of progress and monitoring of results. The Executive Boards of funds and programmes, as determined by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/162, annex I, paragraph 21, are entrusted with providing support to and supervision of the activities of funds and programmes in accordance with the policy guidance provided by the Assembly and the Council. They should place greater emphasis on ensuring that the policy guidance emerging from the Council and its subsidiary machinery is translated into operational guidelines and programmes.

Follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development

40. The high-level meeting of the Council with the Bretton Woods institutions on 22 April 2002 initiated discussions on how the Council can best undertake its mandated role in the Monterrey Conference follow-up, and a number of ideas and suggestions were put forward by participants. There was a clear consensus among participants on the need to move from principles to implementation and action and that the present format and purpose of the meeting should be reviewed and adjusted to these ends. The summary of the meeting by the President of the Council (E/2002/67) provides information on the discussion at the meeting and the way forward for the follow-up to Monterrey.

41. If the special high-level meeting of the Council with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization is to fulfil its expanded role, an intensive preparatory process, both at the secretariat and at the intergovernmental levels, will be needed, as is clearly envisaged in section III of the Monterrey Consensus entitled "Staying engaged". As a first step, a group of Council delegates at the Ambassador level — possibly an expanded, duly representative bureau — could be constituted to engage in consultations with the executive boards of the Bretton Woods institutions and with the World Trade Organization. These exchanges would need to be assisted jointly by the secretariats of the four institutions with a view to developing the agenda and the themes of the spring meeting based on the Monterrey Consensus and the work programmes of their respective intergovernmental bodies. This would involve a deeper cooperation among the four institutions,

inter alia, in preparing for the special high-level meeting.

42. As part of preparations for future spring meetings, it would also be useful to identify specific issues on which focused discussion at these meetings might help promote coherence among finance, trade, and development policies and programmes. An active dialogue with all relevant stakeholders in the meetings of the Council with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization could contribute to this process.

43. Under the Monterrey Consensus, the new features of the spring high-level meeting should include (a) participation of the World Trade Organization, (b) an intergovernmental segment to address an agreed agenda and (c) a dialogue with civil society and the private sector. While the specific modalities will need to be worked out in consultation with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, it would seem that, in view of its broader mandate, the meeting may need to be extended to a day, and be preceded by a dialogue involving civil society and the business sector. While there may be different options as to the format and length of these meetings, prior and more intensive consultations to identify areas for collaborative and coherent actions by the institutions involved will be required to ensure that these meetings have the desired outcome and impact.

Contributing more effectively to sustainable development

44. The Council's role in promoting policy coherence and closer collaboration among the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization is closely linked to the need to integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of development within the framework of sustainable development. The need for such integration should be an underlying theme for all of its segments.

45. In addition to promoting this integration and furthering a holistic approach to the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and the outcomes of the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit through its high-level segment and in the context of the spring meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, the Council could further improve coordination of the operational activities work of the United Nations system in support of country sustainable development efforts, through both its operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment and its coordination segment. The Council should furthermore express willingness to undertake, at its operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment, a determined effort to monitor the efforts of the United Nations system to develop operational guidelines for sustainable development and exchange experiences and best practices.

46. The Council should also stimulate and monitor dialogue and substantive exchanges among its functional commissions and its other subsidiary bodies, to promote collaboration and complementarity of actions on key dimensions of sustainable development. Building on the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Council should ensure that the functional commissions work in a sustainable development framework. In the same context, the Council has an important role with respect to "mainstreaming sustainability" in the work of the whole United Nations system.

B. Peace-building and conflict prevention

Report of the Secretary-General on prevention of armed conflict

47. In a number of recent mandates, the Economic and Social Council has been called upon to contribute more actively to peace-building and conflict prevention. The General Assembly and the Security Council have invited the Economic and Social Council to give its views on the recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General on prevention of armed conflict, which points to a more active role for the Economic and Social Council in implementing some of the report's conclusions and recommendations.[15]

48. The report (para. 45, recommendation 4) recommends that the Council devote a future high-level segment of its annual substantive session to the

question of addressing the root causes of conflict and the role of development in promoting long-term conflict prevention. The Council could give consideration to this proposal in selecting the theme for its high-level segment of 2003.[16]

49. *Long-term strategies to address the root causes of conflicts.* The same report (para. 43) suggests that the Council could consider initiating studies as it considers its involvement in the development of long-term strategies to address the root causes of conflict. The Council could request United Nations system organizations, as well as CEB and its High-level Committee on Programmes, to contribute to such studies.

50. *Regional perspective.* The report also notes (para. 44) that a more active involvement of the Economic and Social Council could be beneficial when the Security Council sets up regional initiatives for the prevention of armed conflicts. It suggests that the Economic and Social Council could consider contributing to a comprehensive and multidisciplinary discussion on the prevention of armed conflict, particularly in a regional context. The Economic and Social Council might give further consideration to this suggestion at its substantive session of 2003, engaging regional organizations as well as the regional commissions in such a discussion.

51. The Council may also wish to reflect on possible actions to support and strengthen regional and subregional approaches and capacities for conflict prevention and peace-building. This could include helping to mobilize the United Nations system more effectively at regional and subregional levels. In this regard, the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2001 of the Council (see A/56/3, chap. III, para. 29) noted the importance of creating a subregional United Nations coordinating capability in West Africa which would assist the United Nations system in developing integrated policies and strategies, ensure the harmonization of activities, and lend support to national and subregional integration (para. 8 (e)).

Ad hoc advisory group on African countries emerging from conflict

52. In follow-up to a recommendation of its Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa, the General Assembly recommended that the Economic and Social Council consider creating an ad hoc advisory group on African countries emerging from conflict.[17] As requested by the Council, a report on the possible mandate, composition and modalities of work of such a group was submitted to the Council in the first quarter of 2002.[18] It recommends a flexible, time-limited approach in setting up such an advisory group, at the request of the country concerned. Such a group would review existing arrangements to meet the country's humanitarian, reconstruction and development needs and make proposals to the Council on how to ensure that the country receives adequate and coordinated assistance in order to prevent the reoccurrence of conflict and promote long-term development. The Council will decide on the possible approach for establishing an advisory group in a first phase, following which it could consider establishing the first such group at its July 2002 substantive session.[19]

Other possible steps by the Council

53. The Council may furthermore wish to consider whether and how it could discuss policy and operational dimensions of conflict prevention and peace-building at its operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation and humanitarian affairs segments.

54. The need to enhance cooperation and coordination among the three United Nations principal organs is now widely recognized and a number of ideas are being pursued.[20] It may be noted in this regard that the General Assembly has encouraged regular consultations between the President of the Assembly and the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.[21] Likewise, the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council have met on several occasions to discuss matters of mutual interest.

55. The Council could, where appropriate, use its convening power to mobilize international support for peace-building in a given country. The Council is well placed, because of the breadth of its mandate and the inclusiveness of its methods of work, to spur action by the United Nations, international financial institutions, donors, regional organizations and other partners to help mobilize the needed attention and resources.

56. The discussions and decisions of the Council on the ad hoc advisory group on African countries emerging from conflict could serve as an input to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly that will conduct the final review and appraisal of the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s[22] in September 2002. The ad hoc advisory group of the Council should be seen as part of the coordinated response by the international community, including the United Nations, to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which will be considered in the context of the final review of the New Agenda.

C. Proposals to enhance the functioning of the different segments of the Council

57. In order to respond to new challenges and devote more focused and high-level attention to key issues, the Council could consider a number of measures aimed at enhancing its overall functioning and improving its working methods.

58. In particular, the Council should build on recent progress and introduce greater flexibility in scheduling its sessions, inter alia, by holding its segments and meetings throughout the year. This would help to elicit participation of high-level policy makers in the work of the Council at a time when they can conveniently participate in meetings away from capitals. This would maximize timely responses, and enhance the efficiency and impact of the Council's work.

59. The Council could consider shortening the July substantive session to about three weeks and holding separately, in alternate years, a high-level two-day meeting on operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation and a high-level two-day meeting on humanitarian affairs issues.

60. The Council should meet, as required, in response to global developments in the economic and social area and address urgent issues requiring its consideration (in other words, it should "be on call"), as provided in General Assembly resolution 50/227.[23]

61. To sharpen the focus of the Council's work and give a greater sense of purpose and unity to its deliberations, the Council may wish to consider linking the coordination segment back to back with the high-level segment and select one theme or related themes for both segments. This should enable the Council to address both the policy and system-wide coordination aspects of the theme. The high-level segment would bring together ministers and policy makers, and heads of the Bretton Woods institutions and other agencies of the United Nations system, and the coordination segment would serve to engage the executive heads of the agencies in a dialogue with the Council.

62. The coordination segment should continue to be the main venue wherein the Council addresses the follow-up by the United Nations system to major United Nations conferences and summits, including the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit.[24] This might possibly include also the follow-up to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, although the Council would need to ensure that it prepares and organizes its discussions on this issue in the way most conducive to ensuring an effective exercise of the specific mandate entrusted to it in the outcome of that Conference.[25] A part of the coordination segment could be devoted to an in-depth consideration of the report of CEB (formerly ACC), including a review of the system-wide follow-up to the Council's guidance and decisions. The segment would draw conclusions from meetings of clusters of agencies held over the year. The Council might furthermore consider holding joint meetings or exchanges with the boards of specialized agencies and funds and programmes, to discuss specific themes related to the follow-up of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit.

63. The Council may also consider devoting one day of its coordination segment to issues related to peace-building and conflict prevention. This would be the occasion to address the development of long-term programmes of support for African countries emerging from conflict, based on the work of the proposed Council ad hoc advisory group, and engage effectively the United Nations system in these efforts. Interaction with the Security Council and the General Assembly could be addressed as part of the same discussions.

64. As regards the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment, the principal objectives in reviewing its work are (a) to strengthen the role of the Council as a forum for international development cooperation and (b) to improve its oversight of Executive Boards and of the funds and programmes.

65. In this regard, the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment could be held in two parts. The first high-level part could provide an opportunity to create a real "development cooperation forum", which would be held once every two years, alternating with the humanitarian affairs segment (which could also be biennialized), and meet at a convenient time for two days. This forum could bring together high-level policy makers, giving them an opportunity to meet both in formal and in informal settings under the auspices of the Council in order to deal with well-chosen and carefully prepared topics related to development cooperation policies and programmes. The forum should cover all forms of development assistance ranging from bilateral to multilateral cooperation and should provide for the involvement of non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The forum would not have the features of a development council. It would enable greater dialogue among key stakeholders and would provide the basis for more informed policy decisions on future actions and major issues cutting across the funds and programmes, including those emanating from conferences and summits.

66. The second regular part of the segment could be held annually for two days and focus on the follow-up to the comprehensive triennial policy review and on management issues, and be better linked to the themes of the other segments.

D. Oversight and management functions (general segment)

67. The Council should consider taking further steps to improve its oversight and management of its subsidiary bodies and the follow-up to its guidance and decisions. To this end, it could further rationalize the agenda of its general segment as follows:

(a) The general segment should focus on the management functions of the Council, including guidance to its subsidiary bodies and consideration of specific system-wide issues relating to humanitarian affairs in alternate years when a high-level meeting of the humanitarian affairs segment is not held; it might accordingly be renamed the "management segment" of the Council;

(b) The outcomes of the functional commissions should continue to be considered on the basis of a consolidated report that should be further improved so as to clearly identify cross-cutting policy issues as well as gaps/overlaps, and areas of complementarity and cooperation. Reviews of each report could otherwise be discontinued, unless otherwise requested by a Member State notably regarding specific recommendations addressed by the commission for action by the Council. The review of this report by the Council should guide the functional commissions in enhancing their complementary contributions towards overarching goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication. During the Council's deliberations under this item, the participation of Chairs of functional commissions should be explored. The Council could also consider holding a meeting of its Bureau with the chairpersons of several of its functional commissions during its sessions;

(c) In addition to their own work programmes, the functional commissions could be requested to provide in a systematic way inputs to the overall theme of the Council's coordination and high-level segments;

(d) The inter-agency dimension of the general segment could centre on system-wide coordination issues that are not addressed in the coordination segment (for example, tobacco or health, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)) and, as proposed above, any ongoing issue relating to the coordination of humanitarian affairs (in years when no high-level meeting is held);

(e) In order to help streamline the segment and to allow more time for the core functions of the Council, the Council could take note of some aspects of issues that have a significant political dimension, and transmit them to the General Assembly for action.

E. Outreach

68. The Council should consider ways of systematically engaging non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local authorities, parliamentarians, universities and other non-State actors with its work. In this connection, the Council may wish to consider the following steps:

(a) The Council could encourage efforts to disseminate its policy outcomes in such a way as to affect debates and decision-making processes at national level and engage key national and international actors in its consideration of major policy issues. It could invite its Bureau to make proposals in this regard;

(b) The Council could consider institutionalizing arrangements for non-governmental organization participation in the high-level segment, as well as structuring it in such a way as to ensure that the non-governmental organization presence at the segment will be geographically representative. In this regard, it may explore ways of funding the participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries in relevant aspects of its work;

(c) Informal regional networks of non-governmental organizations should be encouraged as a way to build the capacities of non-governmental organizations to take part in United Nations work, support coalitions of non-governmental organizations and disseminate information on the work of the Council;[26]

(d) Timely distribution of information should be ensured to non-governmental organizations with limited means of communication;

(e) Consideration could also be given to collaborating with United Nations system agencies to examine accreditation procedures and practices relating to non-governmental organization consultative status with the Council and to promote harmonization of practices within the system as a whole;

(f) Better use should be made of observer status, for the purpose of also involving organizations of an intergovernmental nature in the work of the Council. In this regard, the Council could consider ways of further developing its cooperation with national economic and social councils through the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (in its decision 2001/318, the Council decided that this organization might participate in its deliberations on questions within the scope of its activities).

F. Segment outcomes and logistical aspects

69. The following steps are offered for consideration:

(a) Format of the Council's actions: the Council may wish to review its experience with often long-drawn negotiations on somewhat lengthy agreed conclusions currently adopted at the end of the coordination and humanitarian affairs segments. It would seem that, in their present form, those do not always serve a better purpose than do draft resolutions. It may be more effective to modify them, for example, into two parts: (i) analytical summary of the discussion to be prepared by the Bureau, on the basis of consultations with Council members; and (ii) a short set of agreed conclusions to be agreed upon through informal consultations. Alternatively, the Council could adopt shorter, more action-oriented resolutions;

(b) Logistical aspects: the Council may wish to request its Bureau and the Secretariat to conduct an in-depth examination of logistical aspects of its work, pertaining to the rationalization and timely availability of documentation. It could encourage

further efforts by its subsidiary machinery and Member States to ensure greater overall coherence among the reports presented to the Council, avoid duplicative requests and promote consolidated reporting in response to related mandates. The reports of the functional commissions should focus on substantive issues and highlight coordination issues requiring the Council's attention. The same review could look at ways to avoid overlapping between informal and formal sessions, including more intensive preparation of the various segments before the substantive session. It may also wish to review the timing of its own sessions as well as its subsidiary bodies with a view to promoting greater complementarity among them;

(c) Format of the Council's report: at its fifty-sixth session, the General Assembly, for the first time, considered the Council's report in its entirety in plenary, in addition to considering the relevant parts thereof in the various Committees. Consideration of the Council's report by the Assembly should be an opportunity for reflection on, and discussion of, the Council's work with a view to strengthening the links between these two principal organs. To enable the Assembly to conduct such a substantive discussion, the present format of the Council's report would need to be reconsidered and adjusted in a manner that would facilitate a consideration of the issues dealt with and the action taken by the Council in the course of the year. The Council may wish to request the Secretariat to make suggestions for a format for its annual report that would facilitate such a substantive debate in the Assembly.

Notes

[1] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

[2] See Council decision 2001/299.

[3] This report reflects the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/77-E/2001/69), submitted to the Council at its 2001 substantive session, on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, which were not addressed owing to lack of time.

[4] See the report of the Secretary-General (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1) on the prevention of armed conflict.

[5] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 45* (A/55/45).

[6] Article 65 of the Charter of the United Nations establishes that the Economic and Social Council may furnish information to the Security Council and shall assist the Security Council upon its request.

[7] This ad hoc Working Group was established by the Security Council to follow up the implementation of the Council's recommendations regarding conflict prevention and resolution in Africa contained in the statement by the President of the Council of 31 January 2002 (S/PRST/2002/2) and earlier presidential statements and resolutions. The ad hoc Working Group was also tasked to propose recommendations on the enhancement of cooperation between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council and other bodies dealing with Africa (see note by the President of the Security Council containing the terms of reference for the ad hoc Working Group (S/2002/207), sect. III (ii)).

[8] See notably General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B.

[9] See Economic and Social Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1999/51.

[10] The meetings were first proposed in General Assembly resolution 50/227, annex I, para. 88.

[11] See General Assembly resolution 48/162, annex I, para. 16 (b).

[12] Council agreed conclusions 1999 (see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/54/3/Rev.1), chap. VI, para. 5), adopted by the humanitarian affairs segment.

[13] See the note by the Secretary-General on the themes for the high-level and coordination segments of the substantive session of 2003 of the Council (E/2002/49).

[14] See the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/75-E/2002/57) on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Summit and the report of the Secretary-General (E/2002/53) on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels.

[15] The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/281 of 1 August 2001 on the prevention of armed conflict, invited all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to consider the recommendations addressed to them in the report of the Secretary-General on prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1). The Security Council, in its resolution 1366 (2001), looked forward to

further consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict by the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as well as other actors including the Bretton Woods institutions and supported the development of a system-wide coordinated and mutually supportive approach to prevention of armed conflict.

[16] See the note by the Secretary-General on the themes for the high-level and coordination segments of the substantive session of 2003 of the Council (E/2002/49).

[17] See General Assembly resolution 55/217, para. 7.

[18] The report is contained in E/2002/12. The Council at its 2001 high-level segment focusing on African development had requested the Secretary-General to present such a report for the consideration of the Council within the first quarter of 2002.

[19] This issue is to be considered by the Council also under agenda item 6 of its general segment.

[20] See notably the identical letters dated 2 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council, transmitting the summary and conclusions of a seminar on the issue of cooperation and coordination between the principal United Nations organs, organized by the Netherlands in cooperation with the International Peace Academy, on 19 and 20 October 2001 in Tarrytown, New York (A/56/607-E/2001/106).

[21] See General Assembly resolutions 51/241 (annex, para. 43) and 55/285 (annex, para. 21).

[22] General Assembly resolution 46/151, annex, sect. II.

[23] According to General Assembly resolution 50/227 (annex I, para. 41), the Council may convene special sessions to address urgent developments in the economic, social and related fields that may require the guidance and coordination by the Council.

[24] Agenda item 6 of the substantive session of the Council, under the general segment, is currently devoted to integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits.

[25] The Council has created a new sub-item entitled "Review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010" in its general segment (6 (b)).

[26] The first informal regional network of non-governmental organizations was launched in Hammamet, Tunisia, in January 2002 at a meeting involving representatives of non-governmental organizations and of the United Nations. Regional networks aim to strengthen partnerships between the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and subregional and regional coordinators, and among non-governmental organizations. They also aim to build capacities among non-governmental organizations and reinforce existing skills and human resources.